

PATENT  
DE SYLVA

**COMPACT FLUID CLEANING SYSTEM**

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## COMPACT FLUID CLEANING SYSTEM

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

#### Field of Invention:

This invention relates to fluid cleaning systems. Specifically, the present invention relates to devices for recycling oil, such as engine oil, while the engine is operating. This is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/826,727, filed April 7, 1997.

#### Description of the Related Art:

Oil is a lubricant in a variety of applications ranging from electric generators to printing presses to automobiles. Such applications require clean oil with minimal liquid, gas, and solid contaminants.

Typical engine oil contains a variety of solid, gas, and liquid contaminants. Engine oil is contaminated by gases from engine cylinder blow-by, by solids from engine component wear, and by liquids from coolant leaks and condensed blow-by gas. Liquids combine with sulfur and other compounds from cylinder blow-by, creating corrosive acids, such as sulfuric acid. These contaminants corrode engine parts and deplete special minerals and detergents added to help maintain important oil properties including lubricity and viscosity.

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To reduce problems associated with oil contamination, full-flow filters were developed. All oil circulating around an engine equipped with a full flow filter is directed through the filter or filter housing. High flow requirements limit the ability of conventional full flow filters to remove very small solid contaminants. Large particles of twenty microns or larger often pass through such filters and contribute to engine wear. In addition, conventional full flow filters are ineffective at removing liquid and gaseous contaminants from the oil.

To remove both solid and liquid contaminants from engine oil, mobile, i.e., on-board oil refining systems were developed. The systems continually remove, clean, and replace small amounts of oil from the engine as the engine operates. The systems include a special evaporation compartment that attaches to a by-pass filter. The evaporation compartment attempts to remove both gaseous and liquid contaminants from the oil, and the filter removes solid contaminants as small as one micron in diameter. Such small particles are often smaller than engine tolerances and do not contribute to engine wear. These oil-refining systems may obviate the need for interval oil changes but require interval filter changes.

The systems require a large evaporation compartment and an expensive electric heating element or an engine exhaust heater. The heating element or exhaust heater increases the risk of the systems exploding due to gas ignition. To reduce explosion danger, the evaporation compartments are constructed of strong, thick, and heavy metal, yielding expensive and bulky evaporation compartments.

The large size of the systems limits installation to large trucks and automobiles with ample space. Installation on most modern automobiles is difficult and expensive due to limited space. In addition, the electrical connections or exhaust gas conduits required for the electric heating elements or exhaust heaters, respectively, complicate installation and decrease the reliability of the systems. Public acceptance of the systems has been minimal because of these problems.

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A newer system, lacking a heating element, is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5, 824, 211 to Lowry. Unfortunately, the system disclosed in Lowry has several disadvantages. In particular, Lowry discloses a system having a tubular evaporation surface surrounded by a filter. Oil passes through the filter and onto the surface at several linearly distributed holes near the top of the surface. Lowry surmises that by placing holes at the top of the surface only, oil will have a further travel distance down the evaporation surface, thereby evaporating more volatile contaminants from the oil. This however, does not work as anticipated by Lowry, since the overall rate of evaporation of contaminants from the oil is based on the surface area of the exposed contaminated oil and not the travel distance of a particular portion of the oil. The linearly distributed holes promote channeling when the system is slightly tilted. Channeling of the fluid as it flows down the evaporation surface significantly reduces effective evaporation surface area. Furthermore, Lowry includes a vent, an oil drain, and an oil sample bore in a confined space at the bottom of the evaporation chamber. By positioning the vent in the bottom of the evaporation chamber, any contaminant gases in the evaporation chamber must overcome the buoyancy force of the vapors, which cause the vapors to rise, to evacuate out the vent. This requires significant vapor pressure, which is often not present due to the lack of a heater element. Furthermore, positioning the vent in the bottom of the evaporation chamber next to the oil drain forces undesirable space constraints on the size of the vent and the size of the oil drain. This necessitates a relatively narrow, restrictive vent, which further inhibits volatile contaminant circulation out of the system. The size of the drain is also compromised. This increases the likelihood of oil backing up in the system, covering the evaporation surface (thereby rendering it further ineffective) and flowing out the vent, which lacks a check valve. The design of the vent is also undesirable, as it includes a bend that further restricts the flow of gaseous contaminants from the system.

Hence, a need exists in the art for a safe, space-efficient and cost-effective mobile oil recycling system that efficiently and effectively removes both solid and liquid

contaminants from oil without requiring a heater element. There is a further need for a system that may be easily installed on modern automobiles, which maximizes gaseous contaminant circulation out of the system (by minimizing the vapor pressure required to evacuate volatile contaminants from the system), and which prevents oil from inadvertently flowing out of the system.

### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The need in the art is addressed by the efficient fluid cleaning system of the present invention. In the illustrative embodiment, the inventive system is adapted for use with automobile combustion engines. The efficient system includes a first mechanism for changing the pressure of a fluid, such as oil, from a first pressure to a second pressure, the second pressure lower than the first pressure. A second mechanism distributes the fluid within an evaporation chamber at the second pressure. The evaporation chamber includes an evaporation surface having capillary channels for dispersing fluid about the evaporation surface via capillary action to facilitate evaporation of contaminants from within the fluid.

In a more specific embodiment, the capillary channels are spiral capillary channels. The system further includes a vent that vents the contaminants through a ceiling of the evaporation chamber. Clean fluid is provided in response thereto. The vent includes a valve biased in an open position and lacking a cracking pressure. The valve prevents the escape of the fluid from the system but allows gases to escape from the system unencumbered. The evaporation surface includes perforations therein for allowing the fluid to pass radially through walls of the chamber and onto the evaporation surface. The perforations are distributed in at least two dimensions relative to the evaporation surface to facilitate fluid dispersion about the surface to maximize exposed surface area.

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The oil disperses into a thin film over the heated surface 38, which facilitates the evaporation of gas and liquid contaminants from the oil. Evaporated gases and liquids are vented via a vent 44. The vent 44 is typically connected to an engine air intake (not shown), allowing contaminant gases and liquid vapors to be re-burnt in the engine.

The first hollow space 28, the second hollow space 32, and the third hollow space 36 all illustrate an inefficient use of space. The large metallic evaporation unit 22 is both heavy and bulky, which complicates installation and increases the cost of the system 20. The system 20 must be mounted using very sturdy metal brackets and screws, which are expensive, bulky, and require a nearly flat mounting surface, which is difficult to find under the hoods of modern automobiles. In addition, the heating element 42 is an



force that causes large particles 68 to flow to an outside wall 70 of the housing 56 and subsequently fall to the base 60 of the housing 56. This increases the life of the filter 52 and the time between filter changes. An electromagnet or permanent magnet may be fitted around the outside wall 70 to aid the centrifugal action in removing heavy metallic particles from circulation within the oil.

Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the metering orifice 62 may be omitted without departing from the scope of the present invention. The tube 61 may be extended or retracted, and metering orifice 62 may be elevated or lowered, respectively. In addition, a pre-filter may be attached to the oil inlet 58. Furthermore, the inlet 58 may be located in another part of the housing 56 such as in the wall 70 or in the cap 72.

Oil in the centrifugal chamber 66 is partly contained by a cap 72 that screws on to the system housing 56. Oil flows from the centrifugal chamber 66 through the filter 52 and toward a cylindrical filter support wall 74 that has holes 78. The filter support wall 74 is a tube that is screwed into the base 60. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the support wall 74 may be a part of the housing 56 or base 60 without departing from the scope of the present invention. In the present specific embodiment, the chamber 66 is at or approximately atmospheric pressure.

At typical oil temperatures, such as 195° Fahrenheit, atmospheric pressure is lower than the vapor pressure for various volatile contaminants. The vapor pressure of the volatile contaminants must be sufficient to cause the contaminants to evacuate via the vent 86. Consequently, any pressure drop or flow restriction caused by the vent 86 should be minimized or eliminated. While the vent 86 is shown relatively narrow for illustrative purposes, in practice, the vent 86 is made as large as will fit in the chamber 54.

Oil passing through the filter 52 enters the contaminant removal chamber 54 via the holes 78. The oil is released from approximately engine pressure in the inlet 58 to approximately atmospheric pressure in the chamber 54. A first pressure drop occurs at the jet 62 of the hollow tube 61. A second pressure drop occurs across the filter 52. A third

pressure drop occurs across the holes 78. The sum of the first, second, and third pressure drops are approximately equivalent to the difference between the pressure at the inlet 58 and atmospheric pressure. The pressure at the inlet is engine pressure less any pressure dropped across the hose (not shown) from the engine to the inlet 58. The size of the first, second, and third pressure drops are application-specific and may be determined by one skilled in the art with access to the present teachings to obtain a desired flow rate and to meet the needs of a given application.

Clean oil flows out of the chamber 54 back to the engine via an oil outlet 82. Gravity pulls oil out of the chamber 54 and back to the engine or engine oil pan. The holes 78 are drilled sufficiently small so that the rate of oil entering the chamber 54 and the rate of oil exiting the chamber 54 equalize, preventing the chamber 54 from filling up with oil.

As is well known in the art, the boiling point of a liquid is related to pressure. Lower pressures yield lower boiling points. Consequently, as the pressure of the oil lowers from approximately engine pressure in the oil inlet 58 to atmospheric pressure in the chamber 54, some liquid contaminants may vaporize on the inner surface of the chamber 54, and evacuate from the vent 86. Gaseous contaminants in solution may fizz out of solution and exit the vent 86. This is similar to soda fizzing when a soda can is opened, exposing the soda to atmospheric pressure. The carbon dioxide in solution in the soda vents and leaves the soda when the soda can is opened.

A special evaporation surface 80 exists on the inside of the support wall 74. The surface 80 is ridged and textured to maximize the surface area of the surface 80. The surface area of the surface 80 is significantly larger than the corresponding evaporation surface area (shown in Fig. 1 as 38) of conventional mobile recycling devices. The grooves ridged surface 80 may be implemented via threading. The dimensions of the threads should be large enough relative to the thickness of the oil flowing over the threads so that oil flows in and out of the threads, increasing exposed surface area. Those skilled

in the art will appreciate that a coarse surface merely roughened to promote a thinning of the oil will not result in expanded surface area as oil flows in and out of the grooves, since the grooves will be small relative to the thickness of the oil, and will not cause ripples on the surface of the oil. Furthermore, the deep threads yield spiral grooves, which promote capillary circulation dispersion about the surface 80. Capillary action oil distribution is discussed more fully below.

The extra size of the evaporation surface 80 obviates the need for an electric heater element. Heat from the operating environment of the engine is sufficient to allow the evaporation of contaminant liquids and the removal of contaminant gases from the oil via the evaporation surface 80. The textured evaporation surface 80 allows the system 50 to be installed on automobiles at a near horizontal angle since channeling, which would limit the effective surface area, is eliminated by the textured surface. A screen, mesh, other device may be fitted over the surface 80 for further increasing the effective evaporation surface area of the contaminant removal chamber 54. The lightweight, space-efficient system 50 may be easily strapped or mounted to engine components at a variety of angles, making installation easy and cost effective.

The end cap 72 is screwed onto the housing 56. The end cap 72 is sealed against the top surface of the wall 74 via a washer 84, closing off the contaminant removal chamber 54. The cap 72 also contains grooves 80 for facilitating gripping of the cap 72. The contaminant removal chamber 54 includes a vent 86 for venting volatile contaminants from the chamber 54. In the present specific embodiment, the vent 86 includes a check valve to prevent oil from exiting the chamber 54 in case of an oil flow imbalance. The vent 86 is directed to an air intake (not shown).

In systems lacking heater elements, that the check valve 86 should lack a cracking pressure and should provide minimum impediment to escaping volatile gases. Without a heater element, the vapor pressure may be less than the valve cracking pressure, which is the pressure required to open the valve enabling vapors to escape. Consequently, volatile

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$$\Delta P = \frac{Q128\mu l}{\pi D^4} \quad [1]$$
$$Q = \frac{\pi D^4 \Delta P}{128 \mu l} \quad [2]$$

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Hence, to maintain a given flow rate  $Q > 0$  of contaminant vapors out of the vents (assuming vents of equal diameter), an increase in length  $l$  of a vent requires a corresponding increase in  $\Delta P$ , which requires an increase in vapor pressure within the chamber 54 (assuming outside atmospheric pressure remains relatively constant). Since the vent 86 of the present invention is necessarily shorter than conventional vents, such as the vent disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,824,211 to Lowry and the vent disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 2,173,631 to Niedens, the vent 86 of the present invention requires a smaller  $\Delta P$  and hence, a smaller vapor pressure to maintain a flow rate  $Q > 0$ .

The positioning of the vent 86 of the present invention at the top of the evaporation chamber 54 facilitates circulation of contaminant vapors out of the system. The buoyant force of the contaminant vapors facilitates vapor evacuation from the system. If the vent 86 were disposed in the bottom of the evaporation chamber 54 as in some conventional systems, the buoyant force of the vapors would partially cancel the effective vapor pressure, yielding a smaller  $\Delta P$  and a smaller corresponding flow rate  $Q$ . Furthermore, positioning the vent 86 at the top of the evaporation chamber 54 so that it extends through the ceiling of the evaporation chamber 54, allows more space to expand the diameter  $D$  of the vent 86 and thereby improve the flow rate  $Q$ . If the vent 86 were positioned at the bottom of the evaporation chamber 54, as in some conventional systems, such as that described in U.S. Patent No. 5,824,211 to Lowry, the width of the vent is compromised, since a oil drain must be placed adjacent to the vent. The size of the oil drain is also compromised, which reduces oil circulation out of the system, and may undesirably increase the chance that oil will back-up in the system, covering the evaporation surface, and flowing out the vent.

By positioning the drain 82 at the bottom of the evaporation chamber 54 opposite the vent 86, the present invention allows for maximum volatile contaminant venting and maxim circulation of clean oil from the system by enabling a large vent 86 and drain 82, respectively.

In the present specific embodiment the filter 52 is a high quality one-micron gradient-density filter that may be ordered from a filter supply house. The varying density of the filter 52 provides for a uniform dirt distribution, greatly extending the life of the filter 52. A gradient density filter, also called a graded density filter, has a low density at an input surface and increases in density toward an output surface and thereby distributes contaminants of different sizes through the filter to prevent contaminant films or caked layers from forming and clogging the filter.

When installing the system 50, the oil inlet is connected to an engine pressure tap, such as an oil pressure sending unit. The oil outlet 82 is connected to an oil pan or valve cover operating at or near atmospheric pressure. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that check valves and flow control valves may be installed on the oil inlet 58 and the oil outlet 82 to further control the flow of oil to and from the system 50. In addition, a sleeve made of rubber or some other insulator may be fitted over the housing 56 to reduce heat loss from the system 50.

In the present embodiment, the housing 56, the end cap 72, and the filter support wall 74 are constructed of a lightweight metal alloy and may be manufactured at a conventional machine shop. The vent 86 may be constructed at a conventional machine shop. All materials are heat-resistant and corrosion-resistant.

Unlike the system 20 of Fig. 1, which has an undesirable oil heating effect, the system 50 has a desirable oil cooling effect. The oil sweats out liquid contaminants in the chamber 54. This has an oil cooling effect, as contaminant molecules having high kinetic energies evaporate. This lowers the average kinetic energy of the molecules in the oil and thus the temperature of the oil.

Fig. 3 is a cross-sectional view of recycling system 50' constructed in accordance with the present invention and including an evaporation heater 90 implemented as a heating coil that also acts as an electromagnet. The electric heating coil 90 is imbedded in a wall 74'. The embedding may be performed at a conventional machine shop. The wall



74' includes a first cylindrical wall 75 and a concentric second cylindrical wall 77 having a smaller radius than the wall 75. The coil 90 is rapped around the second cylindrical wall 77. The first wall 75 is placed adjacent to the second wall 77, forming a coil space 79 where the coil 90 resides. The coil 90 has a conventional protective sleeve (not shown) that prevents oil from contacting the coil itself. The holes 78 are fitted with conventional oil resistant sleeves 81 to prevent oil from entering the coil space 79. The concentric walls 75, 77 are sealed at the top by the ring washer 84.

The coil 90 has a resistivity and voltage differential sufficient to heat the chamber 54 to 195° Fahrenheit and may be powered by an engine alternator (not shown), battery, (not shown) or other means. The heat from the coil 90 facilitates contaminant evaporation from the surface 80 when oil from the oil inlet 58 is not sufficiently hot to separate liquid and gas contaminants from the oil on the surface 80.

Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the coil space 79 may be filled with an oil resistant epoxy after the coil 90 is wrapped around the second wall, and before the holes 78 are drilled. This obviates the need for the protective coil sleeve (not shown), and the oil resistant sleeves 81. In addition, the coil 90 may be replaced by a different type of heater; the coil 90 may extent partially up the wall 77; or a pre-heater may be attached to the inlet 58 without departing from the scope of the present invention. Furthermore, those skilled in the art will appreciate that another type of heater placed in another location such as an in-line heater connected to the oil inlet 58 may be used instead of the coil 90 to heat the oil without departing from the scope of the present invention.

Fig. 4 is a cross-sectional view of an alternative embodiment 100 of the present invention including a spin-on filter 102 having a spin-on filter canister 103. The filter 102 is a filter of conventional design with the exception that the filter 102 includes a special interior surface 104 and a vapor vent 106. By employing off-the-shelf parts, implementation of the system 100 is greatly facilitated.



136 includes a conventional ball valve 138 to prevent oil from escaping out the vapor outlet 134 via the vapor tube 136. While the vapor tube 136 is shown extending through the base 124, in most applications, it is preferable that the vapor tube 136 extend through the spin-on filter housing 122 in the top of the system 120. The vapor tube 136 is shown extending from the base in Fig. 5, since in some applications, where venting of volatile contaminants is not as critical, it may be desirable to not alter the off-the-shelf filter 122.

Fig. 6 is a cross-sectional view of a second alternative embodiment 150 of the present invention. The system 150 includes a filter 152 surrounded by an expanded evaporation surface 156.

Heated, pressurized oil enters the system 50 via an oil inlet 112'. Oil flows through the filter 152 and onto the evaporation surface 156 via the small holes 116'. Oil passing through the holes 116' is released to atmospheric pressure, facilitating the vaporization of contaminants from the oil on the surface 156. Vapors are vented through a vent aperture 158, and clean oil drains back to the engine (not shown) via an oil outlet

82. A groove 160 varies in depth around the circumference of the system 50, helping to direct oil to the oil outlet 82, and preventing oil coagulation in the groove 160.

Fig. 7 is a cross-sectional view of a third alternative embodiment 170 of the present invention. The oil recycling system 170 includes an end cap 172. The end cap 172 includes a pressure inlet 174 and an evaporation vent tube 176. The vent tube 176 is made large to minimize the amount of vapor pressure required to vent liquid contaminants. A filter housing 178 screws onto the end cap 172, which seals to the housing at a first oil-tight seal 180. The filter housing 178 has oil inlet passages 182 that feed pressurized oil from the oil inlet 174 to a low-micron or sub-micron filtering media 184. An evaporation/drainage assembly 186 screws into the bottom of the filter housing 178 and forms a second oil-tight seal 188. The evaporation/drainage assembly 186 includes a threaded pipe 190 that extends into a center space partially surrounded by the filter media



the outside surface of the tube 200 for use with the embodiment 150 of Fig. 6. The capillary channels 204 are partially circular and are sufficiently shaped to distribute oil about a circumference of the evaporative when the fluid cleaning system and the evaporation chamber are in a horizontal position.

In operation, oil passes through the outer wall of the tube 200 into the capillary channels 204 via the perforations 202. As oil passes into the capillary channels 204, capillary action of the oil in the channels 204 causes the oil to disperse quickly about the circumference of the channels 204. After oil disperses about the circumference of the tube 200 via capillary action, the oil leaks out of the capillary channel openings and flows across the inner surface to the additional capillary channels 210. The inner surface 208 is a coarse surface that is roughened, such as via sand paper or honing, to further facilitate oil dispersion about the inner surface 208. As oil flows into the additional capillary channels 210, it re-disperses about the circumference of the inner surface 208 of the tube 200 via the capillary action caused by the additional channels 210.

In some systems, such as the system disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 2, 133, 359, to Miller, a corrugated surface is employed to expand evaporation surface area as oil flows over the corrugations. However, the design and dimensions of the corrugations are unlikely to cause capillary action dispersion of oil about the evaporation surface. Furthermore, the surface of Miller is substantially conical, creating wasted space, and lacks radial perforations therethrough for distributing oil evenly about the surface.

In the present specific embodiment, the capillary channels 202 have a cross-section that is approximately five-eighths of a circle. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other types of cross-sections may be employed without departing from the scope of the present invention. For example, the capillary channels 204 may have a semi-circular cross-section or a cross-section that forms three-fourths of a circle ( $3/4$  circular cross-section). Furthermore, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the perforations 202 may be placed in other locations other than coincidental with the capillary channels 204 without

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Capillary action dispersion is based on surface tension at the interface between oil in the capillary channels 202, the mixture of air and vapors within the evaporation chamber tube 200, and the surfaces of the capillary channels 204 and 210. The surface tension  $\sigma$  is the intensity of the molecular attraction per unit length along this interface.

Capillary action is easily observed in the laboratory by inserting one end of a narrow clear open-ended tube into oil. The oil will rise in the tube above the oil level outside of the tube. The oil adheres to the inner surface of the tube. The adhesion is sufficiently strong to overcome the mutual attraction (cohesion) of the oil molecules and pull them up the wall of the tube. The height  $h$  at which the oil rises is a function of the surface tension  $\sigma$ , the tube radius  $R$ , the specific weight of the liquid  $\gamma$ , and the angle of contact  $\theta$  between the oil and the clear tube. The vertical force due to surface tension is  $2\pi R\sigma \cos\theta$  and is balanced by the weight of the fluid in the tube that has risen above the

outside oil level, which is  $\gamma\pi R^2 h$ . Hence, the height that the oil rises in the tube is given by the following equation:

$$h = \frac{2\sigma \cos \theta}{\gamma R} \quad [3]$$

Similarly, capillary channels 204 in the tube 200 of Fig. 8 pull oil around the channels with a force of approximately  $\frac{5}{8}2\pi R\sigma \cos \theta = 1.25\pi R\sigma \cos \theta$ , where  $R$  is the diameter of the capillary channels 204 and 210, and  $\sigma$  is the surface tension of the oil. The factor of 5/8 is included to account for the missing 3/8 of the tube, since the cross-section of the capillary channels 204 and 210 represent 5/8 of a circle, i.e., the openings 206 represent 3/8 of a circumference. Factors other than 5/8, such as 1/2 or 3/4, may be employed instead. The exact factor is application-specific.

In a vertical installation, oil will be pulled around the entire circumference of the evaporation tube 200, since the force pulling the oil around the capillary channels 204 is not impeded by the weight of the oil. In a near-horizontal installation, the capillary channels 204 and 210 will still pull oil completely around the circumference of the evaporation tube 200. Siphoning action of the oil flowing down (due to gravity) one side of a capillary channel pulls oil up the other side of the channel, balancing the effects of gravity and ensuring maximum oil dispersion about the evaporation surface 208.

The surface tension  $\sigma$  of a liquid such as oil decreases as temperature increases. Similarly, as the temperature decreases, the surface tension  $\sigma$  increases. This causes oil to disperse more thoroughly about the evaporation surface when needed, such as when the oil is relatively cool. This helps maintain an effective evaporation rate of volatile contaminants at various temperatures. Capillary action dispersion will still work at higher temperatures but may work better at lower temperatures, where the capillary action is

needed more to maintain the evaporation rate at the surface 208. The evaporation rate is proportional to the exposed surface area. The exposed surface area is maximized via use of the capillary channels 204 and 210.

Unlike conventional systems, such as the system disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,824,211 to Lowry, the perforations 202 in the tube 200 are distributed in two dimensions relative to the inner evaporation surface 208 of the tube 200. This perforation distribution further maximizes oil dispersion about the inner surface and thereby maximizes the evaporation surface area and, consequently, the rate of evaporation of volatile contaminants from the surface 208. Furthermore, distributing the holes in two dimensions about the surface 208 minimizes the negative effects of channeling on evaporation rate when the systems are installed at an angle.

Conventional systems, such as the system disclosed in Lowry, result in prohibitive channeling when the systems are installed at an angle, which is partially due to the linear hole distribution. This channeling may reduce effective evaporation surface area by a factor of five or more. Although the system disclosed in Lowry discloses a coarse surface, the coarseness of the surface is insufficient to cause significant capillary action dispersion about the surface. This is partly because the radius of such very small grooves (which are too small to be seen in the figures of Lowry), as might be caused via sandpaper, will cause any capillary action force to be approximately zero.

Fig. 9 is a cross-sectional diagram of a first alternative embodiment 220 of the evaporation tube 200 of Fig. 8. The alternative evaporation tube 220 includes the perforations 202, which coincide with a spiral capillary channel 222, which is open to the inner evaporation surface 226 at the spiral channel opening 224. The spiral shape further facilitates dispersion of the oil about the inner evaporation surface 226, since the capillary action caused by oil surface tension within the channel 222 is augmented by gravity pushing oil down and around through the channel 222. The component of gravity pushing oil around the capillary channel 222 is  $F_g \sin \theta$ , where  $F_g$  is the force due to gravity, and  $\theta$





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$$x = 0.05 \cos(10y) \quad [4]$$

where  $y$  is a variable representing a vertical or height component, and  $x$  is a variable representing the horizontal or width component as shown in Fig. 10. In the present example, suppose the length of the evaporation tube 230 is 9.0 inches. The length  $L$  of the cross-section (not including dips of the capillary channels 222 and 232) of the surface 238 is given by the following equation:

$$L = \int_0^9 \sqrt{1 + (0.5 \sin 10y)^2} dy \approx 9.5 \text{ in.} \quad [5]$$

Consequently, the cross-sectional length of the surface 238 is expanded by approximately 0.5 inches, which is greater than 5 percent. Hence, the effective evaporation surface area is expanded by a similar percentage. Such improvements are important in automobile mobile oil recycling systems lacking heaters, where surface area maximization is required to maximize volatile contaminant evaporation and to accommodate device size constraints. The surface area may be expanded by much greater than five percent by choosing a different function than that given in equation (4), such as a function with a larger amplitude and higher frequency.

The exact contour is application-specific. The maximum amplitude and frequency of the sinusoidal contour before dripping occurs is increased by the use of the capillary

channels 222 and 132. If the amplitude of the sinusoidal contour is made large (causing deep contours) and the frequency relatively high, oil may drip from the tops of the contours. This may actually further enhance evaporation surface area, since the surfaces of the oil drops themselves may act to increase effective evaporation surface area within the evaporation chamber. If the flow rate becomes too large, the oil may not adequately cover the entire surface 238 and may pour instead of drip from the surface 238 at various positions. Those skilled in the art with access to the present teachings will know how to determine the optimal flow rate for a given application.

The special cavitation perforations 236 will cause oil to squirt from the perforations 236 in applications having sufficient pressure drop across the wall 230. By adjusting the pressure drop and the dimensions of the funnel-shaped cavitation perforations 236, cavitation of liquid contaminants may result near the surface 238. Cavitation occurs when the pressure of a liquid decreases to its vapor pressure, causing the liquid to boil. To cause cavitation of liquid contaminants, a low pressure must be created. In the present embodiment, the low pressure is created as oil is funneled by the cavitation perforations 236, creating a high-velocity jet. The pressure drop across the cavitation perforations 236 is chosen relative to the dimensions of the cavitation perforations 236 so that the velocity of the jets are sufficient to cause cavitation of the desired liquid contaminant. Without undue experimentation, those skilled in the art can employ the Bernoulli equation ( $p_1 + .5\rho V_1^2 + \gamma z_1 = p_2 + .5\rho V_2^2 + \gamma z_2$ ) and the continuity equation ( $A_1 V_1 = A_2 V_2$ ) to select an appropriate pressure drop and cavitation perforation dimensions for a given application.

Cavitation may be demonstrated via an ordinary garden hose by kinking the hose to cause a sufficient restriction in the flow area. The water velocity through this restriction is relatively large, causing the hose to hiss, as vapor bubbles are formed in the hose due to cavitation.

